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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill No. 5642,
An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy
Oversight Committee**

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is David McGuire, and I am the Legislative and Policy Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5642, as we believe that children who have made mistakes deserve humane treatment and a true second chance in life.

As an organization committed to freedom, justice, and equality, the ACLU of Connecticut seeks to defend and promote civil liberties for all people, including youth. This bill acknowledges that the goal of our juvenile justice system is rehabilitation, not punishment, and it offers a more humane and just pathway for our state.

It has been increasingly clear that young people involved in Connecticut's juvenile justice system are extremely vulnerable and need a safe and therapeutic environment. It is also obvious that the best way to prepare vulnerable youth for success is to prevent them from entering the justice system in the first place. As such, it is imperative that we ensure that schools, law enforcement officials, and other members of our communities are prepared to help divert youth from the school-to-prison pipeline and toward a healthy, safe future. We therefore support this bill's provisions to better train police in techniques for working with youth and its provisions to create a truly community-based diversion system.

We also applaud this bill's requirement that the state cannot detain youth for longer than seven days without a hearing. For a child, even one night in a detention center can mean missing academic opportunities and traumatic isolation from critical familial and social bonds. Detention centers should only be temporary waystations of last resort while a child awaits a hearing; they should not be de facto jail cells. Keeping children detained as briefly as possible ensures their constitutionally mandated rights to due process and focuses our juvenile justice system on rehabilitation, not punishment.

In 2014, however, the average youth detained in the state's Bridgeport or Hartford facilities stayed for 17 days—more than half a month of missed classes, practices, and chances for family support. In addition, detention centers reflect extremely troubling racial disparities. In 2014, nearly eight in ten children (78%) detained in Bridgeport and Hartford were Black or Latino, while 21% were white. This discrepancy is even worse than it was in 2013, when 72% of

detained children were Black or Latino, and it is almost an inversion of the state's overall racial demographics.

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it will take a village to create a twenty-first century juvenile justice system. We therefore applaud this bill's multifaceted approach to engaging law enforcement, schools, corrections officials, and more in the effort to divert youth from prisons to productive, happy lives.

We encourage you to support House Bill 5642.